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LETTER DATED 16 MAY 1995 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon the instructions of the President of the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we direct the following facts and considerations to the Security Council.

At approximately 8.40 a.m. Sarajevo time, the besieging Serbian forces launched a multi-pronged and multifaceted assault upon both the defensive lines of Sarajevo and its population. As of the time of this letter, 6.00 p.m. Sarajevo time, the attack continues unabated.

The direct shelling and sniping of civilians has already accounted for a large number of casualties including murdered children. The number of heavy projectiles fired into Sarajevo by the Pale Serbs has eclipsed our capacity to keep exact numbers but certainly exceeds several hundred. At least some of the fired projectiles came from heavy weapons recently taken from the United Nations collection points. All of the heavy weapons used in this attack, by definition of course, violate the now largely fictionary "exclusion zone" around Sarajevo.

Simultaneously timed, the Serbian forces have also launched a two-pronged artillery and infantry assault upon the defensive lines of the government forces protecting the city. From the north of the city, the Serbians have opened a 4 to 5 kilometre front. From the south of the city, the attackers have opened up to a 6 kilometre front with even greater intensity.

This coordinated offensive operation by the Serbian forces could not have been initiated without substantial advance preparation. It appears to be part of a concerted plan of action employed by the besieging Serbian forces in increasing their strangulation of the city over the last several weeks.

We also have information that UNPROFOR has been targeted within the city environs, of course, without any response yet.

At least some United Nations functionaries are implying in their wide-ranging comments to the media that the Bosnians have provoked the Serbian assault, and, therefore, that this justifies a "no-response" attitude from UNPROFOR and NATO. Let us be clear on the following:

1. President Izetbegovic has personally informed me that the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has not engaged in offensive actions, consistent with our commitment made on 30 April 1995 that we would not undertake offensive military action.

2. The multi-pronged and coordinated attack upon the civilian population of, and defensive positions guarding, Sarajevo could only have been initiated after substantial preparation, and is another escalation of the tightening noose around Sarajevo. For several weeks now, while emphasizing their rejection of the Contact Group plan, Karadzic, and other extremist Serbian leaders, have been promising a new resolve in pursuing military solution for all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sarajevo, in particular.

3. The failure of UNPROFOR and, by extension, NATO to respond to this noose that has been tightening daily in front of all of us can only be deemed a contributing factor to the current dramatic situation.

4. Blaming the defenders for the current assault may serve the dubious purposes of some who want to escape responsibility for non-action and the ever-worsening consequences.

5. The International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has recently officially indicted some and accused others, particularly Karadzic and Mladic, of war crimes including for the shelling and sniping of civilians in Sarajevo and other towns. Those, including United Nations officials, that somehow rationalize the targeting of civilians by referring to fictitious or real Bosnian "provocation" not only ignore the documented evidence of the ever-tightening Serbian noose, but also seem to equate the targeting of civilians with military objectives. These rationalizations may serve the purpose of both soothing consciences and attempting to justify the failure to respond to the attacks upon the safe area/exclusion zone of Sarajevo as mandated. But one final caution: war crimes cannot be rationalized by fictitious or real provocations, and those that employ such rationalization are on the verge of a free fall into a moral and legal chasm which has already swallowed Karadzic and Mladic.

The people of Sarajevo find noxious the tired commentary of United Nations spokesmen repeating the often abused line "both parties have resorted to a military solution". First, the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has agreed to the Contact Group peace plan while the Pale Serbs have not. Second, the death of civilians that are specifically targeted in Sarajevo and other places cannot be thus rationalized. These civilians are the victims of war crimes and not military options. They were neither combatants nor bystanders, but the targets of terrorism, whether in Sarajevo, London or Oklahoma City.

Finally, Mr. President, once again emphasizing our commitment not to undertake military offensive action, we also must counter with the obvious position that we cannot, in the future, continue to stand by while the besieging Serbian forces tighten the noose and those mandated to respond only scurry for excuses to justify inaction. Our responsibility to our population, sovereignty

and territorial integrity does not allow us to ignore the reality and to find comfort in fiction.

May I ask Excellency for your kind assistance in distributing this letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Muhamed SACIRBEY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative